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the bed of the stream; these are held in position between upright poles set V-wise in the boulders, to which are fastened horizontal bamboo poles as railings. As they have no saws, the 'plank' is a tree trunk with one side trimmed flat with the axe. Even more elaborate bridges are sometimes made at high levels over streams liable to flood, from tree-fork to tree-fork on opposite banks.

Though, as has been said above, agricultural conditions nowadays determine village sites, hill-tops or rocky slopes remain favourite sites, and become commoner as you penetrate farther into the Abujhmar hills. The traditional arrangement is a street some twenty-five yards wide between parallel lines of long-houses; at one end of the street is the *gotul-lon* or village dormitory, generally within a rounded bamboo fence, and sometimes in front of this dormitory will be seen the *udam-garia* or seat of honour of the *kasyeq-gaita* and possibly also of the secular headman (*gaita* or *peda*), as well as the stones on which the other village elders sit around with them in conclave; but the *udam-garia* custom is not found in all parts of the hills. Sometimes the shrine of the *Nar-Talughi* or Village Mother is actually inside the dormitory fencing, and she is often housed there for a while when a village is being shifted. There are, as a rule, no *bari* (vegetable gardens) attached to each house as amongst most Gonds, including the Bison-horn Marias and the Murias of Bastar; but sometimes the *kasyeq-gaita* has a small tobacco *bari* attached to the dormitory in the centre of the main street. The *Gazetteer* (p. 50) speaks of the 'common granary' as standing in the broad street; but with one partial exception, Nugur village in Kutru Mar in the Indrawati valley, I have never seen this. The villagers generally construct a row of granaries (*manda* or *wijja-dodi*) on piles at the side or rear of the main village street, sometimes nearer the *penda* fields than the village; this row can hardly be called a 'common granary', as each villager has his own granary in the row for his own private food and seed store, the granaries being built together only for convenience, as they can then be watched at night by one watchman for the whole village, sleeping in a special hut at the side of the granaries or under a granary. At Nugur there were big matting bins in the main street in which all the rice seed of the village was stored; but here the village had come under the economic thraldom of some Teli tradesmen, who for years had advanced rice to the cultivators. The bins were left in the collective charge of the headman and elders, and any villager could help himself to seed on the understanding that at harvest he would replace it with 50 per cent. interest, the Teli owners being also free to remove the surplus from time to time.

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interior villages send down their young men in relays to work for wages at Allapilli. There they get prompt and regular payment and just and fair treatment. There are resting-sheds where the Marias can sleep, leave their scanty personal possessions and take their meals in clean surroundings, not divorced from their own kind. The Forest Department are arranging ever-improving facilities for them to purchase cloth, grain, salt and ornaments at fair prices. Forest work is in itself a technical training. At one time also the local officials tried to establish at Allapilli a small carpentry and basketry school.[1] Everywhere on this tour I met Marias who were on their way either to or from Allapilli, or had worked there from time to time in the past and looked upon it as a place to which they could always go to earn quickly any cash needed for payments of rent, fines or bride-price. More than one passage in *The Aboriginal Problem*[2] describes the Marias' consciousness of the fact that the Allapilli departmental forest operations have saved them from debt and distress; the establishment throughout the Chanda zamindari forests of similar 'Allapillis' was one of my recommendations. Allapilli has further been the one thing that has saved the Marias from the economic ruin that they feared when the Court of Wards and district authorities by a sudden ukase stopped their *podu* or *dahi* cultivation.

From Allapilli we motored eastwards by forest road and by estate forest tracks, generally motorable after slight repair in the open season, to Bhamragarh, halting a night on the way at Pirmeli; it was some fifteen miles from Allapilli to Pirmeli, and another twenty-three on to Bhamragarh. I had been preceded on this tour by Mr. Kerawala inquiring into debt at each big village, and the neighbouring village *bhumias* and *gaitas* and the *patti Sendhias*[3] from miles around gathered again to repeat to me what they had already told him. The first such gathering was at Mirkal[4] and the next at Pirmeli itself. At both places we heard much about money-lenders and their methods, and I therefore reproduce from *The Aboriginal Problem*[5] the gist of Mr. Kerawala's report on what he was told at Mirkal and Wateli;[6] those whom he saw at Wateli came to my camp at Pirmeli.

At Mirkal he enquired particularly into the economic and social conditions of the Marias of Mirkal, Sagangatta and Kasampalli villages. He found that many were heavily in debt to Hindu

[1] *The Aboriginal Problem*, p. 283.
[2] Pp. 257, 332 and 366.
[3] See p. 287.
[4] *Ordnance Survey of India*, Sheet 65A, *ref.* MV2148.
[5] Pp. 180-2.
[6] *Ordnance Survey of India*, ref. MV4035.

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426 563 money-lenders of Ahiri and Rajaram.[1] Few loans had been taken in cash, and the borrowers being unable to read or write had to depend entirely on the word of the money-lenders. Mada, son of Bodka Maria, of Sagangatta had borrowed Rs. 20 for wedding expenses ten or eleven years before from a Rajaram money-lender, and since then had been repaying him from time to time, generally in kind; he admitted however that he had also taken occasional loans of seed grain. He had no idea of the rates of interest and no means of checking his account, but had been told by his creditor that he now owed him Rs. 100. Korke, son of Kesu Maria said that his 'kind' *sahukar*, Chinwar Poshatti of Ahiri, was good enough to have gone on accepting for years whatever he had been able to pay towards a debt of the details of which he was completely ignorant. A Sagangatta villager had borrowed Rs. 40 twenty years ago from a Kalar money-lender in Ahiri for a wedding and, though he had since repaid many small sums and had given his creditor a bullock and a cow, had been told that he still owed Rs. 100; he said that the Kalar would never explain how he worked this out, but he thought the heavy rate of interest to be the reason why the debt still grew. Generally the Marias said that if they needed seed, they could only get it from the Ahiri and Rajaram money-lenders, who advanced seed on condition of repayment with 25 per cent. interest at the next harvest or 50 per cent. at the second harvest if they defaulted at the first; no consideration was given to failure of crops, and it was only on the promise of payment of 50 per cent. interest that further time was allowed for repayment of principal.

Similar tales were told at Wateli and at my Pirmeli camp by the very large gatherings of Marias. As at Mirkal, cash loans were few but nearly all had taken seed loans at rates of interest varying, even for punctual repayment, from 25 to 50 per cent., and going even higher than 100 per cent. in the event of default. Even if cash is borrowed, interest is paid annually in grain until the borrower can find cash to repay the principal. In fact the money-lenders seem to reckon on perpetual interest in kind on petty initial loans of five to ten rupees. Thus a Maria from Khandanwadi village had borrowed Rs. 10 from an Ahiri Kalar four years before; in each of the first and second years he had paid grain worth Rs. 10 merely as interest, but in the next two years his crops had failed, and he expected in the fifth year to have to pay either Rs. 40 or Rs. 50 worth of grain. A Maria from Pokht village had borrowed Rs. 5 six years ago, from a Telugu money-lender of Indaram, but as he had repaid nothing the Maria headmen said that he was a ruined man, as the money-lender's claims must have so swollen that the Maria

[1] *Ordnance Survey of India*, ref. MV1833.

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would never be able to repay during his lifetime, and the debt would devolve on his sons. Another Maria from Irakdumme village had borrowed Rs. 20 bride-price from an Echli money-lender ten years before and had so far paid him paddy worth Rs. 22-8 as interest, but nothing towards principal, and had no idea what the final demand of his creditor would be. Another Maria from Batanfundi village had borrowed Rs. 12 from an Ahiri money-lender six or seven years ago and though he had repaid the principal was still being dunned for Rs. 40 worth of grain as interest, and was afraid that this high rate would now be doubled, as owing to the crop failure of 1939 he had been unable to repay any grain that year.

Throughout this area a crying need is an agency for advancing small seed-loans. The Government have seldom done this, on the theory that the zamindar should meet his tenants' needs; but we could not find one who had ever been given a seed-loan by the estate. The rates of interest extorted by the nests of money-lenders at Ahiri, Rajaram, Allapilli, Indaram, Echli and other centres are preposterous. The need for these seed-loans has been imposed on the Marias largely by the arbitrary stopping of their *podu* (*dahi*) shifting cultivation; *podu* fields always produced seed grain at least. Such is the pathetic honesty of the Marias that when the Debt Conciliation Board was working they readily acceded to the money-lenders' request to place their thumb-marks by the hundred on application after application begging the Board not to interfere between them and their money-lenders: it was only by persistent effort that the Board secured nearly 800 applications. In our camps the Maria elders opposed debt relief measures on the ground that if a man borrowed it was only right that he and his heirs after him should go on repaying. The final report of the Debt Conciliation Board of 1936 mentioned some fantastic cases. In one a Telugu Komti of Indaram had lent a Maria of Koreli a bullock on hire in 1920, at the usual fee of Rs. 4 worth of paddy. For twelve years the Maria went on paying Rs. 5 worth of paddy. In 1932 the Komti made out that the Maria still owed him Rs. 700 worth of paddy, and proceeded to show against him further compound interest of 50 per cent., until, when the Board took up the case, the Komti claimed as much as Rs. 2,320 worth of grain—all this for the hire of a single indifferent bullock. This, however, pales into insignificance against an Echli case of a money-lender lending Rs. 32 to finance a wedding a few years before, and in his accounts showing this debt, despite a repayment of Rs. 20, as having risen to Rs. 17,519!

At every halting place and camp the Marias' chief grievance, however, was not so much the exactions of money-lenders as the

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241 312 Bahadur D. Lakshmanswamy in his 1922-4 Sironcha and Garchiroli Settlement Report, paragraph 31 :—

'Agriculture in parts of these zamindaris is as thorough as in the most advanced *khalsa* tracts. One has simply to look at the extensive rice fields and *gattas* of the Madias [*sic*] to admire the almost mathematical levelling of their field embankments. The Maria Gond has a genius for rice cultivation. He selects the best *rilas* position area, and with an intuition for irrigation lays out his fields one below the other so as to utilize water from the field above to that lower down. A natural stream or spring of water is generally never allowed to go waste by him. He so embanks and diverts the supply by a system of well arranged water-channels as to utilize the whole supply for his rice area, however distant it may be. Even in the remotest part of the zamindaris agriculture has now developed beyond the domestic stage and assumed the commercial stage. The aboriginals constituting the greater part of the population of these zamindaris mostly live on the early rice, small millets and beans, while the heavy rice grown in the big *gattas* and embanked areas is exported to the markets.'

241 Now it should be noted that this means that for his own subsistence the Maria still relied on the grains and beans dear to his heart, and grown by *dahi* or *jalapod* cultivation, which had not then been stopped except in parts of Ahiri. The growth of heavy rice as a commercial crop is yet another sign of the transition from an economy in kind to a cash economy. Of this the money-lender takes full advantage.

241 406 563 For in these plains villages around Bhamragarh and Lahiri, besides Marias and Gonds there are nests of Teli exploiters, notably in the six villages of Lahiri, Mallampodur,[1] Kukurmeta,[2] Arawara,[3] Dodrai[4] and Idadapalli.[5] Many of these Teli money-lenders are now wealthy, as a result of small grain loans to the plains Marias and Gonds. The *modus operandi* is repayment indefinitely at rates of interest so high that the principal can never be repaid, while interest takes the form of a steady and heavy share of the debtors' harvest. Some of the Telis resort habitually to molestation of their debtors until the latter satisfy their yearly demand, but though molestation of debtors is now a cognizable offence under the Debtors' Protection Act, the police in their far distant police station at Etapalli never take action against molesting money-lenders. We have seen already on page 102 how these Telis' tentacles had spread to such Bastar villages as Nugor in Kutru Mar in the Indrawati valley, where there were big matting paddy bins in the main street in which all the rice seed of the village was stored on behalf of the Telis, who were free from time to time to remove all paddy from the bins surplus to the Marias' seed requirements, while each Maria villager was free to help himself to seed on the understanding that at harvest

[1] References on *Ordnance Survey of India*, Sheet 65A :
1. MV7951
2. MV7854.
3. MV7955.
4 and 5. Not marked.

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he would repay with 50 per cent. interest.[1] Although it is clear that these Teli, Kalar and Telugu money-lenders do levy an exorbitant toll on the Maria villagers' produce, it is equally clear that they are fulfilling a necessary function, which has become the more necessary since the stopping of *podu* or *jalapod* cultivation below the hills has restricted the Marias in most villages to permanent rice cultivation on small acreages always dependent on seasonal rainfall evenly distributed in time. If such money-lenders are excluded, then they must be replaced by Government grain depots and village grain banks.

Of Maria funeral rites the *Gazetteer* observes that a stone or a carved post about five feet high is usually put up to mark the spot where a man's body has been cremated, and that 'sometimes one comes across a forest glade strewn with these memorials, the only sign of some deserted village, the very name of which has perished'.[2] Many rows of carved wooden posts may be seen between Bhamragarh and Lahiri, while at Lahiri itself I saw scores of such posts and of the small cromlechs (*hanal-garya* or 'thrones of the Departed') described on page 273, and mentioned in the *Gazetteer*[3] as built on the spot where the body was burned. The top of one of these very substantial funerary posts, or *hanal-gutta*, photographed at Lahiri, is reproduced as one of the illustrations in this Supplement. Noticeable are the carved wooden horns, between which is a carved wooden bird, probably a hornbill. The wooden horns are common, and probably are a modern symbol of the cow formerly sacrificed at the erection of a menhir or wooden *hanal-gutta* by Hill Marias[4] and Bison-horn Marias[5] throughout Bastar: the funerary customs of the Chanda Marias seemed, however, to be Hill Maria in type, and this was confirmed by oral enquiries at Lahiri.

The addiction of the Bison-horn Marias and of the Kutru Hill Marias of Bastar to cock-fighting has been described on page 162. I particularly inquired if the weekly cock-fights at Oikal in Ahiri zamindari, there mentioned, and at Lahiri itself still went on. But all cock-fighting among Chanda Marias had for some years been stopped under orders from an inexperienced young European District Superintendent of Police on the theory that it contravened the Gambling Act. But the Marias maintained that, as in Bastar, so here, there had never been cash betting (as, indeed, one might expect in a region where all transactions are still so largely in kind), but the defeated bird had passed to the owner of the winning bird.

[1] For further details, see *The Aboriginal Problem*, pp. 183-4.
[2] *Chanda District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909), p. 106.
[3] Ibidem, loc. cit.
[4] See pp. 278-9.
[5] See p. 281.

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same ceremonies and festivals are observed in connexion with cutting and firing of the *penda*, sowing, harvesting and first eating of the new crops. Most of the reaping of the ' big *kosra* ' crops had been completed, but that of the ' *os kosra* ' millets and pulses was still in progress. For many of the *penda* plots in the current *kaghai* cultivation clearing (see p. 107) this was the second and last year of cultivation, and the *kutki* crop raised was known as *hiwar*, a term, according to the *Gazetteer*,[1] always technically applied to these second year crops. I sent specimens of both *hiwar* and *kosra* or *kohala* (see p. 134) for identification to the Nagpur Agricultural College: botanically both were identical. These villages have never had the advantage of the special system of poll-tax assessment on every able-bodied axeman in the village which I devised for Bastar (p. 145). The system followed in these hill villages of Ahiri is roughly this. Each *penda* is cut by a number of villagers with the approval of the *gaita*, and the portion cut by each of them is roughly marked by one or other of the methods indicated on page 131. Help is taken from other villagers, who are always ready to give this mutual aid, and at harvest the produce is divided among the different shareholders of the *penda*, with something also for all who helped to clear the *penda*; sometimes a number of plots are specially earmarked for division of the produce by the *gaita* and elders amongst all who joined in clearing the whole *kaghai* and in watching and fencing the crops; a part of the produce is also allocated to villagers too old and feeble to work. The zamindar's *kamdar* or agent is paid rent, usually in kind, by the *gaita* for the whole village, for paying which the *gaita* takes a share of the produce of each *penda* plot. The village cultivation is in fact a truly co-operative enterprise.

I have alluded above to the arbitrary stopping in the plains Maria villages of the Chanda zamindaris of *dahi* cultivation, and the consequent increase of debt among the Marias. This Kuvakodi hill tract is fortunate, however, in having escaped this prohibition; it is the only Ahiri area where *penda* reigns undisturbed. It was therefore no surprise to find not a single case of old debt among the fifty or sixty Hill Maria cultivators who assembled at my camp from Kuvakodi and the other hill villages. Occasionally when crops are poor and the *kamdar* has to be paid rent in cash, the *gaita* goes to a Teli money-lender in the plains to borrow the money. But the villagers look on this as the debt of the whole village, not of the *gaita*, and though the Teli is as unscrupulous here as in any plains village in exacting high interest, yet the combined villagers are usually able to repay in kind in a year or two. Nowadays sometimes not only they, but even their Bastar neighbours, instead of resorting

[1] *Chanda District Gazetteer* (Allahabad, 1909), p. 170.

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to the Telis, send relays of young men to earn the needed cash by working at Allapilli, and it is noteworthy that these workers do not regard the wages thus earned as their individual property, but as the earnings of the village which sent them there and provided them with food for the journey. Let us hope that the economic self-sufficiency which has hitherto kept these hillmen out of the clutches of the money-lender will be preserved (which means that their *penda* must not be stopped). They are subject, however, to three pests. The first is the frequently corrupt *kamdar* of the zamindar. The second are the village watchmen or *kotwar*, generally of Mahra or kindred untouchable castes, to whose circles these hill villages are attached. These Mahras have their headquarters in plain villages, whence they make periodic tours of the hill villages to levy various illegal dues from the Hill Marias. The third pest is the itinerant cloth pedlar, usually a Mahra, who supplies cloth on credit and then tries to levy a perpetual tribute in kind. I met one of these men in this tour during my visit to the adjacent Bastar village of Nelanguri. Bazaars are so remote that these pedlars, if they could be prevented from selling on credit, and be made to charge reasonable prices, would fulfil a useful function. All these abuses could be checked by effective official touring: Mr. Kerawala's and my visits were unfortunately red-letter events in the Marias' lives.

Dancing at Kuvakodi was all in the traditional Hill Maria style, but sadly inferior to dances at such Bastar centres as Orcha or Handawada, although at least half the dancers were Bastar Marias. But even in physical type these Marias from the western fringes of the Abujhmar Mountains are inferior. Here, as I noted of Bastar during my March 1934 visit, the Maria dancer has given up the rib-dress or *gatikarhana*, the dancing-shield and the gay head-dress and skirt, though he still retains the traditional buttock-bells, the songs, the *pata-bhita* or ' song fellows ' and the dance-steps.[1]

The descent back to the Lahiri camp was almost more tiring than the climb had been. Lahiri that evening was full of an eager crowd, to watch the dancing and partake of the liquor that was ready for the dancers. Here the dancing was lively and vital, but differed in various ways from Hill Maria dancing, if of Hill Maria type. The *dol* drumming was marked, even though the single-membrane *turam* drum more typical of the Hill Maria was much in evidence. Perhaps, however, the strongest impression was the astonishing wealth of ' jewellery ' worn by the girls: enquiry showed that apart from strings of beads, almost all the silver and brass and aluminium necklets, armlets and other trinkets worn by the women had been purchased from metal-workers in Bastar State. There seemed here

[1] See pp. 75-6 and 183-4